

## Literary Critique Essay

A good literary critique essay will retell the essential parts of a story for those who don't know it, explaining how the author created a piece of writing worth reading.

In other words, your retelling will all be in support of one idea, your CLAIM, which states the main *message* of the author.

### Literary Critique Essay Sample Structure

#### Paragraph 1.

- a. Hook
- b. Orient reader to author, piece of writing, and its context
- c. Claim

**Body Paragraphs:** In EVERY paragraph, include, in any order:

- a. Evidence
  - (1) What happened (context)
  - (2) quotes
- b. Commentary
  - (1) Connect evidence to claim

**Conclusion:** End with a gift. Connect to something new and different that gives your reader something to consider about the piece of writing.

#### Here's what these terms mean, in more depth, along with a few other tips:

**Hook.** Grab the reader's attention with the first line. You can do this with action, a deep thought, vivid description, or dialogue.

**Orient reader.** In 1-3 sentences, identify the title, author, and subject of the piece of writing. Don't summarize the whole piece of writing in detail. Write just enough; assume the reader knows nothing yet about the piece of writing.

**Claim.** The claim is your angle, your road map, a preview of your critique. It is what you will organize all your evidence around. A claim can't be purely true; it has to be able to be argued one way or the other—it must be what you're going to PROVE.

A literary critique essay should mention the author and theme.

It should specifically identify *what (specifically)* the author is saying about a *general subject*, such as life, relationships, gender, or class. This is the theme.

In other words, it should be a **rewording of this formula**:

(Author's name) is making a point about (general subject); the specific point s/he is making is that \_\_\_\_\_.

It should suggest that the author is using the characters, setting, plot, or voice to make that specific point about a general subject.

For example: “O’Neil uses the protagonist Sydney to argue that rich white men actually can find real happiness not in loving relationships, but in material possessions.”  
(The general subject here is happiness.)

**Evidence**—on two levels: one, support your claim with **events** that happened in the piece of writing (This is to show the context of your quotes). Stay focused: don’t summarize the piece of writing unless it’s as evidence for an idea of yours.

Two, use **quotes** (with page or line numbers) from the piece of writing. "Quotes" just means excerpts; they don't have to be dialogue. Incorporate them into your context by having quotes and context share sentences. For example:

*Not incorporated (aka QUOTE BOMB):*

Janie’s images for romantic happiness come from nature. “Life should be more like a pear tree in bloom, she thinks” (67). She thinks this when she is unhappy in her relationships.

*Incorporated:*

Because Janie’s image for romantic happiness comes from nature, she thinks, “Life should be more like a pear tree in bloom” (67) when she is unhappy in her relationship.

Notice in the examples above how to punctuate around quotes, and how to mark the page or line numbers. For marking page or line numbers, put ( \_\_# ) in parentheses after the quote ends, followed by the period or comma that would be inside the quotes if the sentence needs one.

**Commentary.** Make sure that before or after each quote, you point out how it connects to the claim. As with blending in quotes, you can do this with variety and finesse. (You don’t have to mention the word “claim,” or say the term, “proves my point.”) For example:

*Repetitious and obvious:* This also proves the claim because a rich man is happier with an expensive toy than he is when in love.

*Subtle yet effective:* Once again, O’Neil portrays rich men as happier with expensive toys than in love.

**Another tip:**

Avoid pointing out that you are writing an essay. Don’t write, “In this essay I will…” or “I will first describe… and then I will…” or “When I first started to think about this subject…” or “In conclusion, I have proven…”